

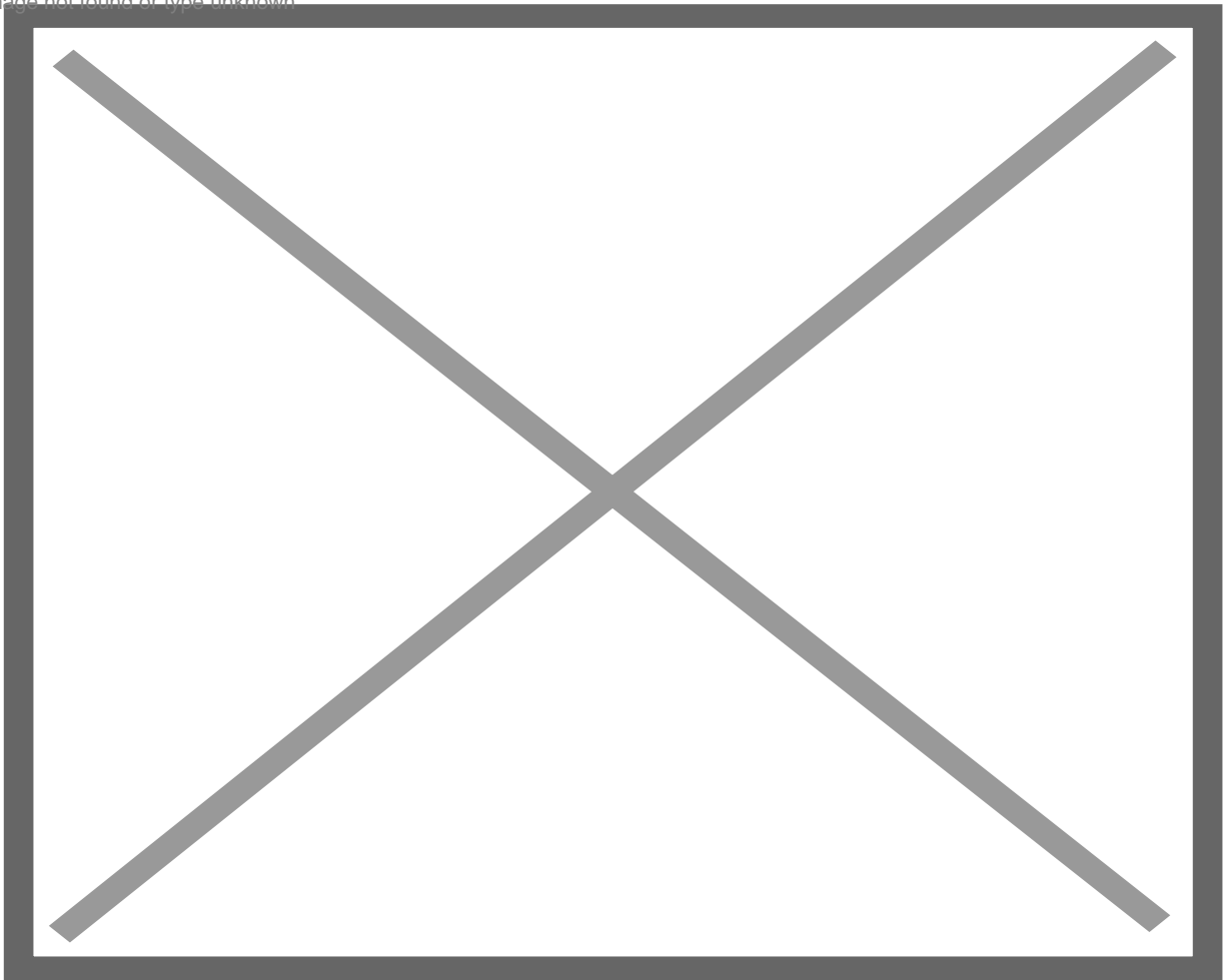
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Bill to Re-Establish Separate Horse Racing Commissions for St. Croix and St. Thomas Passes First Senate Hurdle

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The merger that [created](#) the V.I. Horse Racing Commission could be reversed soon, if draft legislation proposed by Senator Samuel Carrion becomes law.

On Friday, the 35th Legislature's Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports and Parks met to consider updates on the progress of redevelopment of the territory's two race tracks, and to debate the draft legislation.

Mr. Carrion emphasized that the new bills do not seek to dismantle the existing Virgin Islands Horse Racing Commission. Instead, Bill 35-0083 proposes the establishment of separate horse racing commissions for each district, ostensibly allowing for more local autonomy and

representation. "Separate commissions ensure that each district's voice are heard and concerns are understood," Mr. Carrion said. "This also enhances representation and inclusivity as commission members can directly shape policies affecting their horse racing community."

On the other hand, Bill 35-0073 outlines the powers and duties of the horse racing commission, aiming for clarity and smooth decision-making. Mr. Carrion noted that the legislation comes in response to changing circumstances. Initially, a single commission was established because there was one promoter for both major racetracks in the Virgin Islands. However, that is no longer the case, prompting the need, the senator believes, for separate commissions for each district.

Testifiers, following Senator Carrion's introduction, shared sharply contrasting opinions on whether separate commissions should be re-established.

"I personally am against anything that's divisive in its territory," said Hugo Hodge, current chair of the Horse Racing Commission. He argued that a singular territorial commission is more efficient, eliminating scheduling conflicts and maintaining consistent rules and regulations. Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation Commissioner Calvert White also expressed disapproval of the idea.

To address president of the Flamboyant Park Horsemen Association, Elroy Bates Jr.'s concerns about an imbalance of representation on the Territorial Horse Racing Commission, Mr. White noted that "Instead of separating, the more prudent thing would have been to find and replace that vacant position."

In contrast to Mr. Bates's' arguments against the proposal, Clinton Hedrington, president of the St. Thomas/St. John Horsemen Association, mainly voiced concerns about standardizing rules across all districts. "We really don't have any opposition; we just really would like for the rules and regulations to be standardized across the board," he said.

Meanwhile Jay Watson, a former member of the Horse Racing Commission, urged industry stakeholders to clamp down on unregulated horse racing to simultaneously promote compliance with federal regulations. "Convenience is the enemy of excellence," Mr. Watson advised. When questioned directly by Senator Franklin Johnson about his thoughts on the two horse racing commissions, he reframed the issue from a different perspective. "The issue isn't whether one district should get more than the other district. The issue is how do you build a horse racing industry in each district? And let's be clear, when we talk about building a horse racing industry, that can't happen on St. Thomas, it can only happen on St. Croix," he said, contending that the Big Island, as St. Croix is called, has the space to facilitate a thriving industry.

Following debate on the measure, Mr. Carrion offered an amendment to Bill 35-0073 which, among other things, will provide for the publication of quarterly profit and loss statements by the new associations. That amendment was passed, and so were the two proposed bills, without the support of Senator Francis Heyliger. They will both now be passed to the Committee of Rules & Judiciary for further consideration.